

## **Amherst Public Shade Tree Committee Fiscal Year 2011**

In May, Amherst celebrated 24 years as a Tree City USA, an honor bestowed by the National Arbor Day Foundation. It did this by meeting several criteria that demonstrate that we as a municipality are devoted to our goal of making trees a much-cherished priority.

As a committee, our purview is the trees that grow within the public right-of-way --- a margin of varying widths along our roads that technically belong to the town. The tree warden is charged by MGL Chapter 87 with protecting the “urban forest,” and our members advise him. Whether siting new spots for planting the next generation of shade trees, or protecting the root zones during road and building construction, or protecting the canopy and treeline around power lines and poles, the APSTC did much to make these things a matter of public will and policy

To enable us to actively pursue our goals, the APSTC expanded its membership from five to seven, a change that the Conservation Commission and Selectboard supported. Having more members will enable us not only to maintain a strong relationship with the Tree Warden, but also to fulfill a greater range of activities, namely: reaching out to the community and its residents to plant and care for trees; and advocating for them at all levels of town government.

As to public outreach, we organized a successful Faith Planting on Arbor Day, at the end of April. Some six of the town’s 21 churches, synagogues and mosques participated, planting trees that the town provided in the following places: along Churchill Street (First Congregational Church), at the Carriage Shops on North Pleasant Street (Hampshire Mosque), along North Pleasant Street north of UMass (Immanuel Lutheran) and on Rolling Ridge Drive (the Bahai Community). Mercy House also took a number of trees to plant on its property on North Pleasant Street, and members of the Unitarian Meeting House are going to plant a tree in front of the building once a gas leak is addressed.

We sponsored a booth at the Amherst Sustainability Festival, handing out bare-root whips of Kousa Dogwood (*Cornus kousa*) and Serviceberry (*Amelanchier*). Tree Warden Alan Snow and APSTC chair Hope Crolus served on the organizing committee for this festival.

As to advocating for trees at the level of town government, we found much support from the new Town Manager, John Musante, who went above and beyond in finding resources to assure that the town had money to purchase, plant and care for trees. Throughout the year, APSTC members appeared at meetings of the Conservation Commission, the Planning Board, and the Public Works Committee to stress the same thing: that shade trees don’t “just happen,” they must be planned for, designed around, funded, and protected; that they are a crucial part of the ‘green infrastructure’ of the town, performing feats of stormwater mitigation, air quality control, and carbon dioxide absorption.

The APSTC was vocal during meetings about Sand Hill Road. We were not in favor of the removal of about 24 mature trees, mostly oak and maple, which imparted much shade, beauty, and bank stabilization along this road. We cited the Scenic Roads Act, a state bylaw adopted by Amherst in the 1970s to preserve the rural character of some 26 roads around town. We made the point that trees, along with stone walls, are the hallmark of “the New England scenic road” beloved throughout the world, and that widening and straightening these roads -- as was proposed and ultimately done on Sand Hill -- turns these Amherst gems into thoroughfares of suburban blandness.

The APSTC waged what felt many times like a fruitless struggle to save trees at Atkins Corner, where two large roundabouts are being installed at the end of a decade of planning. Members were chagrined that trees had not been part of the planning, and our entrance into the discussion came only at the very end when decisions had already been made. Eleventh-hour changes by the road builders and designers rendered our efforts to save some very fine trees, including a majestic 42-inch white oak, to be for nothing. With this bitter lesson behind us, we applied to the town engineer to notify the APSTC of upcoming road projects so that key trees could be identified and designed around where possible.

With sincere thanks for their years of service, we saw the departure of Conservation Commission liaison Otto Stein and longtime member Professor Dennis Ryan. We were also notified of the upcoming departure, after 49 years, of William Hutchinson. All of these members served the APSTC with knowledge and feeling.

Hope Crolius, Chair  
Amherst Public Shade Tree Committee

